

Home Waters

By Ron Wilson

There are dozens of fishing holes located within a bike ride of many North Dakota communities.

Some of these waters over the years were built primarily to provide fishing opportunities for wet-behind-the-ears anglers who, some would argue, are better served drowning a worm than getting into mischief. Other waters were maybe something else once — water supply ponds for towns or the railroad — but now hold fish. No matter their origin, kids and adults alike don't have to take a road trip to float a bobber, or tease a lure along a weed line. They have their home waters.

"What happened at Watford City is a good example of locals trying to promote fishing close to their community," said Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries management and research supervisor. "They took a very old city lagoon that was dried up for years, scraped all the muck of the bottom ... and now they're into their second year of fishing."

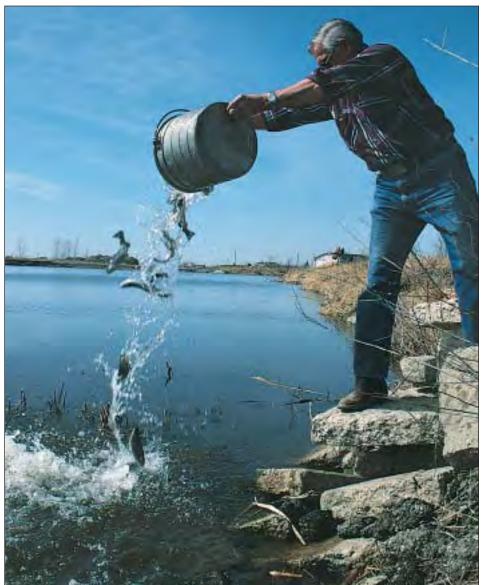
Watford City Pond is a put and take fishery stocked by the Department and will likely suffer winterkill because it's shallow. Yet the challenges are worth it because people are fishing. "It very important nowadays to compete with all the other opportunities out there competing for kids' time," Power said. "If you have a little pond near or within the community, kids will take it upon themselves to fish. And if they have a little success, they'll keep coming back, next time maybe with their parents."

The social interaction home waters provide is likely more important than a limit of fish, said Terry Steinwand, Department fisheries division chief. "Hopefully, these fisheries provide some mom and pop time with

the kids," he said. "A lot of us don't get enough time with our kids, but a fishery close to home is maybe one of those things that can provide that."

The majority of the home waters around hold mainly trout and bluegill, species easily trapped and transported from elsewhere, and big enough to bend rods and provide an immediate fishery.

Trout stocked in Langdon City Pond were big enough to bend rods, providing an immediate fishery for anglers.



Gunther, 13, has plenty of time on the water thanks to fishing holes located near home.

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Fishing waters in or near (within 3-4 miles) North Dakota citites and towns. The map does not include rivers/streams or towns with fewer than 200 people.

Teen Angler

Without hesitation, Gunther, age, 13, will tell you that his favorite place to fish is Lake Sakakawea. Not exactly his home water, considering he lives in Bismarck. Then again, his family has a cabin on the big lake, so it certainly qualifies. Even so, every other weekend or so at Sakakawea isn't enough to satisfy his need to fish. So, Gunther and his buddies fish local haunts, buying their own bait in exchange for a ride from Mom or Dad.

Factors that define a community fishery for this story – waters located within 3-4 miles of communities of 200 or more people – are arbitrary. McDowell Dam, located 3 1/2 miles east and 1 mile north of Bismarck doesn't qualify (by a measly 1/2-mile) under these guidelines, but it should. And it will, considering that's where Gunther and gang do the bulk of their fishing. "We go there a lot during the summer," he said. "Last year we caught a 4-pound largemouth bass ... we put it back."

The idea of having a McDowell Dam or Cottonwood Park in south Bismarck or the Game and Fish Department's OWLS Pond so close and handy is not lost on Gunther. He knows his beloved fishing time would suffer without them. "I'd still get to go fishing, but not nearly enough," he said. This from a kid who buys his Dad books on fishing for his birthday, but is always the first to read them. This from a kid who would watch fishing shows with Grandpa when he couldn't fall asleep at night.

To fish these community waters, Gunther said you don't need much for equipment: "A pole, fishing line and worms will do and you'll catch fish." What you do need a lot of, however, is fish willing to bite. "Kids need to have fun when they are fishing and that means catching fish," he said.

To catch fish you have to understand a little something about your quarry: "I fish the structure where the baitfish hang around. If you find the baitfish, you'll find the fish you want to catch. I've been reading a lot of fishing books, so that's where I learned that."

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Another tip: Gunther said he carries a cell phone even when fishing close to home just in case something goes wrong. The key, however, is minding the whereabouts of your phone. "I bent over once to pick a fish out of the water and I had my cell phone in my



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sweatshirt pocket ... and it fell into the lake," he said. "I could see it down there, but it was too deep to get it."

Target AudienceGaebe Pond is less than 2 miles west of New Salem. It's within walking distance of town, a hike that Bob Schwagler, overseer of the pond, makes occasionally for the exercise.

The pond is on private property, stocked by Game and Fish with trout and bluegill, and caters to youth, senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. The Central Morton Sportsmen's Club, the group behind the community fishery, has provided the labor over the years, building fence, picking up litter, doing what is necessary to keep the site in good shape.

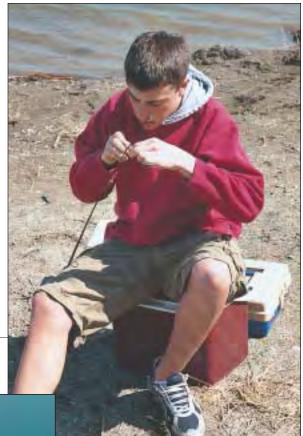
"The pond has been beneficial to the community," Schwagler said. "I go out there maybe twice to three times a week to see

what's happening and I always run into people fishing the pond. The kids have either taken their bikes out there, or were dropped off by their parents."

Gaebe Pond has been a fishery now for about 10 years. It's a New Salem recreational staple. "The landowner has been real cooperative and we appreciate that," Schwagler said. "It's nice to have that kind of relationship where a lot of people benefit."

The Gaebe Ponds of North Dakota serve a purpose. "They provide a fishery for today and hopefully help recruit anglers for tomorrow," Power said.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



Tying the perfect knot to a favorite fishing lure can mean the difference between a fish in the net or not.



In the end, fishing is about spending some quality time with family.